United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/105

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 December 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third session
11–22 March 2019
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Legion of Good Will, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-20228 (E) 051218

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Statement

How can we build social protection systems that are gender-responsive without reinforcing gender stereotypes? This is the central issue of our statement to the 63rd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). We, from the Legião da Boa Vontade (LBV)/Legion of Good Will (LGW), present our experience in addressing concrete and cultural obstacles to women's empowerment, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable population.

We are a network of organizations located in Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay), North America (United States), and Europe (Portugal) that operates in more than 100 cities. We support over 15 million services and benefits free of charge to low-income families through 95 educational and social assistance centres. Our Organization was founded in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) on January 1, 1950 (World Peace and Universal Brotherhood Day), by the late radio broadcaster Alziro Zarur (1914–1979), and is presided over by José de Paiva Netto, a journalist, writer, and educator.

This statement is presented in four subheads: (I) Links between social protection and gender equality; (II) Provision of care services for families and children; (III) Social assistance programs and empowerment of women; and (IV) Promotion of Ecumenical and Global Citizenship.

I. Links between social protection and gender equality

In September 2018, the UN Women convened in Glen Cove (New York State, USA) the Expert Group Meeting in preparation for this year's session and discussed the need to redesign social protection systems that do not meet the demands of the female population. After all, the "World Employment and Social Outlook — Trends 2015," a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), revealed that even when there is economic growth in a country gender inequality generally remains unchanged.

Brazil, where our largest operation is undertaken, has policies aimed at reducing the gender gap. The "Human Rights of Women" report, published by the United Nations in Brazil in July 2018, highlighted the fact that women have priority in the main national cash transfer and affordable housing programs. However, even if we consider the period when the Brazilian economy grew the most in the last decade, racial and gender inequality in the world of work persisted and strongly affected the female and black population.

What explains this paradox? Several academic studies in the country have pointed out that, even though the policies that have been adopted are necessary, they end up legitimizing the stereotypes that perpetuate this inequality. To a certain extent, they reinforce the idea that it is a women's role to care for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities in the family. This unpaid work impairs women's insertion into the labour market on an equal footing with men.

This is why we emphasize the importance of the debate about the need to implement measures that benefit women who decide to dedicate themselves fully to the family, such as establishing pension systems that recognize this often "invisible" work that they carry out; combating discrimination in the workplace; guaranteeing fair payment for domestic workers, etc.

II. Provision of care services for family and children

We consider the provision of family and child care services to be a priority. Our centres are dedicated to expanding them, thus encouraging women to lead a productive life.

We currently run nine schools that offer early childhood education to children living in poverty in South America and we are building one in the United States. According to the "Education at a Glance 2018" report, which was published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), although the investment in day care centres and kindergartens has increased in recent years in Latin America, it is still low when compared to more developed countries.

Brazil, for example, increased the amount spent in this area from 0.4 per cent to 0.7 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 2010 and 2015. Even so, among children aged 0–3 years old — who make up 20 per cent of Brazilian households with the lowest income — one-third (33.9 per cent) do not go to school because there are no places for them or there is no day care centre close to their homes. In the 20 per cent of households with the highest income, on the other hand, only 6.9 per cent of the children are affected.

We also provide social assistance services and programs for children and adolescents at social risk in almost 70 cities in Brazil (according to UNICEF, 61 per cent of the Brazilian population under the age of 18 live in poverty — a total of 32 million people). This ensures some peace of mind to thousands of mothers who are afraid of their children falling victims to grooming by criminal organizations. After all, only 15.3 per cent of public-school students study full-time, while half of the Brazilian population feels the presence of organized crime or criminal factions in their neighbourhood, according to a survey by the Brazilian Public Security Forum that was conducted by the Datafolha Institute in 2017.

The aging of the population is also another challenge. According to projections by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in around two decades' time the elderly will make up a quarter of the Brazilian population and outnumber children and adolescents up to 14 years old. For this age group (women account for 55 per cent) we have developed social assistance actions in 40 cities, with a particular focus on socialization and the strengthening of ties.

For the elderly who are unable to take care of themselves or who do not have a family member looking after them, we have three homes in which they can live in. There are also senior citizens who only attend these facilities during the day, while their relatives are at work. Most of the people who look after the sick or dependent elderly people in Brazil are generally elderly women who come from the same family and are not paid to do so.

It is worth mentioning that our work is almost entirely privately funded, with donations being collected through a well-established fundraising structure. Most of the donors, employees, and beneficiaries of the Organization are women. This is a trait of the Legion of Good Will since its origins, dating back to the end of the 1940s.

Along with the work carried out, we also find it necessary to face up, in the cultural field, to what our President, Paiva Netto, defines as "the obstacles offered by a chauvinist male culture," which we do mainly through our social assistance programs and by training people for the job market (item III). We also promote debates about this topic in our schools and in our means of social communication, the goal being to alert people to the importance of fostering global citizenship (IV).

III. Social assistance programs and empowerment of women

Before being assisted by our services and social assistance programs, each woman is interviewed so we can identify the hardships they experience, particularly those gender-related. Based on the information gathered, our team, comprised of social workers, phycologists, and educators, draws up a plan in order to carry out specific interventions that help overcome risky situations and prevent violation of rights.

In all planned activities/workshops, even those aimed at families with unborn or new-born children, there is no division or distinction by sex. Everyone can take part and decide at various times what activities they would like to be involved in according to their own preferences. This opportunity helps break down gender stereotypes, expands the universe of possibilities for girls, and promotes equality, both in the domestic life and in the world of work.

Girls and adolescents are also more likely to be excluded from social participation and the appropriation of public spaces; they commonly spend more time doing household chores or playing games that reinforce socially pre-established gender roles. In our centres, however, they are able to expand their experiences by way of the Children: the Future in the Present! Youth: the Future in the Present!, and Good Will Apprentice programs. They provide a healthy environment for girls and boys to socialize and prevent girls from becoming victims of domestic child labour, which is considered one of the worst forms of child exploitation.

We also work directly with immigrants and refugees, valuing their knowledge and culture, promoting their integration, and helping them face up to situations of isolation and discrimination that primarily affect women. We also train young people and adults for the job market helping them to provide for themselves, thus increasing their participation in the productive world. Above all, we teach women who benefit from our programs and social assistance services about their rights and their responsibilities, and we strengthen their autonomy and self-image.

IV. Promotion of Ecumenical and Global Citizenship

Finally, facing up to "the obstacles offered by a chauvinist male culture" begins by first promoting an effective change in one's ideas and values. Our mission, as defined by educator Paiva Netto in our statutes, is to awaken Ecumenical Citizens, in other words, Planetary Citizens. To achieve this, we promote dialogue on gender equality in our schools — which have their own transversal and interdisciplinary curriculum that combines teaching content with universal values — and in our media, which include 23 radio stations, one national TV network, and several channels on digital platforms.

Our directive is to highlight female leadership in the many sectors of society and in the various areas of human knowledge, from Science and Economics (where historically, but even today, the actions of women have frequently been overshadowed) to Religion, in which we exalt those who have been eternalized in the Sacred Texts, but not always duly recognized. Educator Paiva Netto argues that in order to build a world worthy of Jesus, Hypatia, Gandhi, Wangari Maathai, the Holy Mary, Buddha, Helen Keller, Anne Sullivan, Marie Curie, and Malala Yousafzai — a world for which they and so many other women and men have fought and keep fighting for — each person should be respected for his or her singularity: "Societies that depress them [Wome] do it to themselves. An enlightened Woman makes the family bond strong and a grand, moral, respected, and united community."

"We can find their example of courage in the Gospel of Christ according to John 19:25. This passage reports the support Jesus received from women who were solely

accompanied by the Beloved Disciple [John] at the moment He was to be crucified: 'Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.'

These true heroines, in the depth of pain, did not abandon Him, but firmly remained by His side in a demonstration of outstanding bravery.

No social, political, and/or religious movement can decisively progress without having the support of women, both in public and private spheres. History is proof of that.